

The Stories of Manoj Das and R. K. Narayan: A Brief Comparative Study

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Abstract: This article proposes to cover some of the stories of Manoj Das and R.K. Narayan with its special focus on 'The Mystery of The Missing cap', 'A Letter from Last Spring', 'The Dusky hour' and 'Laksmi's Adventure' of Manoj Das, and 'Malgudi Days', 'Lawley Road' and 'A Hero' etc of R.K. Narayan. The background and theme that both the writer, Manoj Das and R.K. Narayan chose are 'local' while their vision was out and out global and universal. The regional overtone of both the writers, reinforce the Indianisation of Odisha in the case of Manoj Das no less than 'Malgudi' in the case of R. K. Narayan. Their characters are not from the higher background. They are out and out common men and women from among us. Themes and structure of both the writers are alike. They build of their stories with the touch of humanity and seeds of knowledge compacted in the mind of innocent children. The joy and sorrows, the pain and pleasures of common man, the moral and human values that common man holds are the subject matter in both the writings of Manoj Das and R. K. Narayan. They have successfully projected the cultural values of their time and society in their plots and protagonists.

Keywords: English Stories, Manoj Das, R.K.Narayan,

Manoj Das and R.K. Narayan are two literary stalwarts whose outstanding artistic splendor in studying the encyclopedic human nature remain as hallmarks for ever. Both the writers are bilingual and significant ones spanning over more than four decades with their continuous endeavour in improving for innovating themes and structures in their fictional and non-fictional works. Both the writers are centenarian in their respective craftsmanship in literature, language, culture and mass media. They played out their roles as social scientists, reformists, columnists and social activists, while touching the hearts as novelists and short story writers. Both started their writing career as free lancing columnists and regular subscribers to different periodicals. Both of them were the proud recipient of multiple prestigious awards. They remain like steady milestones of Indo-anglian literary high way during the post-independence era.

The background and theme that both the writers, Manoj Das and R.K. Narayan chose are 'Local' while their vision was out and out global and universal. The regional overtone of both the writers reinforce the Indianisation of Odisha in the case of Manoj Das no less than 'Malgudi' in the case of R.K. Narayan. Both the writers have emphasized more on to rural setting than urban. Besides the characters are not from the higher background. They are out and out common men and women from among us. But they are artistically developed with multiple dimensions.

Themes and structures of both the writers are separately high lighted at length. The narrative skill, characterization, style, language and other techniques are categorically explicated in the preceding chapters. Any purple patches of history or puranic, or scriptural incidents or situations have been scrupulously avoided in the stories of both the writers. But at points Manoj Das has employed symbols and gives some touches of allusion and myth to make his characters living and loving ones.

Initially, both the writers had adapted descriptive structure though, gradually they changed towards the narrative descriptive style. Style of narration of any writer depends on the attention it draws from the readers. Keeping such technique intact, both the writers Prof. Das and R.K. Narayan build up their story world. Sometimes they have used their journalistic style as well as oratorical technique. In the process both the writers adopt 1st person as well as third person narrative skill. These stories are categorised as descriptive. In this context there is a direct relation of the writer with the reader.

When one goes to theories, the short stories Manoj Das, and R.K. Narayan, both share the past-colonial ethos. We get ample parallels in stories like Manoj Das's "Last News in the Relation" and 'A news in the Luvarva Mountain' and Narayan's 'An Astrologer's Day, Gate Man's Gift,' 'Lawley Road' and others. The subject matter of stories of both the authors, Das and Narayan, are mostly based upon theme of modern, mystery, miracles, myth and legends within the socio-political milieu. But the treatment has

been all through natural and spontaneous. Best effort has been made to give 'a comparative analysis' all the above cited characteristics. In case of a bilingual writer it is natural to confront certain problems when a story written in the mother tongue and then rendered into English. Here the process of 'Transcreation' arises.

A creative writer and a translator may not be one person as Manoj Das asserts. It is relevant here to quote one of the theories of translation. "Translation is not an innocent and transparent activity but it is highly manipulative metaphor that involves the process of transference across the linguistic and cultural boundaries. It is always imbibed with cultural baggage and socio-political and economic historiography. According to Haroldo de Campos, the Brazilian translator, translation is a process of transcreation, transportation, transmigration, transculturation, transmutation, transposition, transtextualization and transmission of culture. Translation has been at the heart of colonial encounter to establish and perpetuate the superiority of culture over other", (*Journal of the Odisha Association for English studies. 'Translation- A symbiosis of culture'*) 152-153. According to the above statement transparency can not be maintained when one renders, S.L to T.L. For example we can see 'The Mystery of the Missing Cap' and 'The Malgudi Days' of R.K. Narayan.

The technique of maximization through minimization could be another speciality that both Manoj Das and R.K. Narayan share in their stories. Besides ancient and traditional stories, the stories of Manoj Das and R.K. Narayan seem to be smaller in size than their contemporary front ranking writers in English or any other native language. They (stories) maintain the basic framework and features, shape and size, meaning and meaning above all the structure, theme, sources, plot and characterization.

Symbolic, language, small sentences with colloquialness, simple, short and significant representation are ordinarily extra-ordinariness of both the bilingual writers in the world of their short stories. All the human elements of our everyday life are satisfactorily and artistically well arranged that seem to be like sweets of human sets and seats of knowledge compacted lie in a box. That's why both the writers are universally accepted as classics on their own rights.

It is often said that he is a true artist who can present the men, milieu, and manners of his time. He is Manoj Das, and R.K. Narayan too. In case of portrayal of character both the writers never fail to give their pen-portraits of their nail and neck. They (characters are wisely selected from among us by both the writers) apply their discretion and ingenuity of craftsmanship as authors in their stories with due regard for sequences, scenes and

permutation and combination of the classical unities of time and Space.

It may sound like repetition if we highlight the irony, humour and dramatization of human follies and foibles underlying their stories. Once again we are reminded of Chekov, Maupassant, Saki, Henry and Hardy at once.

Depersonalisation in the act of narration of the stories of both the writers (Manoj Das and Narayan) may be another distinct feature of their story world. In portraying countless and as old emotions, memories, different generational gap and the toils and turmoil of human predicament are vibrant and forceful in their stories. The joy and sorrows, the pain and pleasures of common man, the more and human values that common man holds dear are the subjects around which Manoj Das, R.K. Narayan's stories evolve. Their characters are found to be people of slender means. They miss a lot in life. They are sad at times but never forlorn. They can laugh at their miseries, hide the melancholy to ease pain, bring the pleasure to their lives,

Manoj Das is a master in the art of spinning the yarn. The main structure of his stories is buttressed by several secondary threads or anecdotes. He employs the old method of boxing stories quite successfully. He never introduces his theme or topic all at once but unfolds it gradually. The reader seems to walk leisurely through many a corridor and antechamber like the merry pilgrims of Chaucer ambling their way to 'Canterbury'.

Browsing through his stories is similar to the experience one feels while visiting an unfrequented place or fort for the first time. The experience, nonetheless, is gripping and rewarding. It is a kind of psychological journey bordering on the liberation of mind and buoyancy of spirit.

Qurratulain Hyder, a renowned short story writer herself is of the opinion that Manoj Das, as a sensitive writer, "evokes that particular mystery and romance one usually associates with his home state Odisha". ('preface' *Short stories from India*) - 8.

Narayan creates his comedy by employing all the effective devices of a humorist — both traditional and innovative. His stories are rich in situations and incidents. There are occasional flashes of ingenious farcical situations, as well as rare touches of satire too. Imparting to his comic genius a wide spectrum. We are struck by the novelty in his treatment of everyday situations and actions. Above all, the genial quality of his humour sustains our interest in the stories. This urbanity emanates from a compassionate comic sensibility. It is one of the most remarkable achievements of Narayan.

The innate humanism of Narayan's vision imparts to his writing a warmth which is the secret of his universal appeal and abiding charm. Even the

seamy side of life gets radiated under the steady, warm gaze of this unpretentious writer. What may appear to be trivial to the Western eye acquires a particular meaningfulness and significance in the Indian context. The rituals, ceremonies, traditions and modes of the Indian life provide Narayan with inexhaustible sources of material. Narayan's creative vision, steeped in the Indian tradition of detachment, views the eternal human predicament in terms of comedy of affirmation.

Manoj Das's stories have some message. There is, underlying his stories, 'a moral nexus and a tough ethical core'. But he is not overtly didactic. Whatever message he has, it is wrought into the aesthetic framework or texture of his stories.

His approach is always subtle, his seemingly simple and open designs never betray his real intentions. Slowly and steadily, he leads to a depth the reader is hardly aware of. Hence subtlety is the cardinal characteristic of Manoj Das's Stories.

Although he presents human predicament in his stories, his world is not that dark and bleak. In his stories, we never come across Kafka's grim, harrowing, and unreeling picture 'human loss, estrangement, guilt, anxiety an experience increasingly dominant in the modern age'. (Phillip Rahv, *Introduction, Selected Stories of Franz Kafka*) 8-9. His stories are refreshingly free from the element of horror, sex, and violence the crudities which make most of the modern writings morbidly distasteful and keep the readers mind sullenly down. They are distinguished by their aesthetic quality, abiding human interest, and universal appeal. They stir out of the depths of our being and we partake of something akin to 'The Sublime'.

Time and again, Manoj Das seems to suggest that evil or any other negative impulse can be transcended by a positive human feeling or action or attitude like love, sympathy or fellow feeling.

Manoj Das is traditional in form and technique but modern in idea and sensibility. He is original in devising plot invention, the subtle interpretation of things, and the use and adumbration of language,

The old stories are charmingly retold and fresh insight is brought into the contemporary human situation. Even if realistic topics and superstition were dealt with by earlier writers. It is Manoj Das who treats them in his own characteristic way with a touch of vividness, delicacy and authenticity revealing the rarer aspects of things. He intensifies a simple situation in the manner of Washington Irving and reads essence and meaning into it.

The Indian background, especially, the background of Malgudi lends a unique charm to R.K. Narayan's stories. The creation of the imaginary old world town of Malgudi is an imaginative blending of old with new life-style and against this background the characters of the fictional

world are presented with vividness and realism. Thus, Narayan gives to Malgudi a local habitation and a name and makes the references concrete and realistic. It is said that the drama "Hamlet" of Shakespeare cannot be conceived without Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark. Likewise, the reader cannot conceive of the locale of Narayan's major stories without a reference to Malgudi. Thus, it is a symbol of Narayan's fictional world, which presents a social order fragmented by political evils, economic disparity, the conflict of values and superstitions.

It is significant that Narayan's characters mostly belong to the common run of humanity and represent the life and culture in the ancient land of India with its paradoxes of life-wisdom and ignorance, profusion and poverty, joys and sorrows. But in spite of such a picture, the reader is moved by his comic vision of life, his understanding of the characters in their gusto and emotional make-up.

Technically speaking Manoj Das's style is ritualistically adjective-ridden.

Meenakshi Mukherjee observes ".....the bulk of Indo Anglian writing even now is marked by two characteristics, a meretricious ornate and adjective-ridden style, and an excess of solemnity. (Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Manoj Das*) 199.

But Narayan has a continual development as a story writer. As a result, new experiments in short story contribute to the variety and abundance of his craft. His language and style, art and vision, ensure him a place as a distinctively new writer in the rank of the first-rate story-tellers of the world. The present study takes up this point in its wider implications but at the same time, it focusses attention on the typical Tamilian atmosphere that reverberates the larger legend of Indian life, its people, and its place in the festoon of civilizations. This study relates the plots, characters, dialogues, settings, incidents and the points of view of the writer in an integral critical spectrum and makes an analysis of the stories in the wider context of the short story as an art form.

Both the writers express their symbolic significance through their characters, plot construction and different objective co-relatives in their respective story world. Let us have a bird's eye view of both the writers. It has much been discussed in the previous two chapters and specially in the chapter of comparative analysis. Their symbols are represented somewhere in the allegorical modes 'Farewell to a Ghost' of Das's shows the traditional belief and ethos that ingradiently grow in human community. A ghost has become an invisible force which is indispensable in the psyche of the villagers. The suggestion to avoid such evil is the motivating force of the writer for avoiding traditional blind belief. This story relates to Lakshmi's Adventure.

Her death is the death of innocence or the crucifixion of innocence. It reminds us of Orwell's beautiful essay 'shooting an Elephant' where the elephant died at cross legged. That symbolizes the death of English imperialism which Orwell feels. It seems to similar of Das's above said two stories.

The messages as different stories of Manoj Das are very important one which reveal the universal values. Various problems relating to socio-political dimension in the short stories are solved in it in various sequence by the character themselves. As write himself has confessed in several time. In the story world of Manoj Das the characters motivate the theme or plot of the story while Narayan's plot of story Leads the character. Both have the same objective values of human life, having different means. It is quite distinct in the story "Mystery of the Missing Cap" and 'Statue' are burning example. The village headman, Babu Birakishore the minister of fishery and fine art and the monkey Jhandu in The mystery of Missing cap' represent various political problems and the process of the solution of the matters. This gives a full panoramic pictures of present political status and the comic situation of the politicians. This reminds another parallel vision in the story 'The Statue' where the Major characters like Jameswar Gupta, the ex-politician, police superintendent and the present home minister create same kind of comic atmosphere.

The above incidents in two short stories, 'The Mystery of Missing Cap' and "The Statue" of Manoj Das remind the same humour and irony reflected in R.K. Narayan's story 'Lowley Road.' The statue of Federic Lawley is to be removed in substitute of existing local politician. That process needs money and mind unnecessarily. It is the picture of arrogance and egocentric attitude of so called local politicians. In quest of power, social establishment they shift the statue from place to place, by the help of municipal corporation. The narrative task of the story is done by the 'Talkative Man' in the dramatic manner, while Manoj Das's 'Mystery of the Missing Cap' begins with abruptness. Mr. Fredrick Lawley was military Governor who had settle down here after mutiny the declared the jungles and built the town Malgudi and many social welfare work were done by him. Therefore his statue was erected, In the process of time, people have forgotten him, for which the present chairman of 'Malgudi' town wants to erect his own statue. This is the arrogance and power hankering attitude of the municipal chairman like Jangyeswar Gupta, the former leader of Manoj Das's story 'The Statue.'

Both the writers feel for the loss of the sanctity of democracy and they cry for the rise of hypocrisy. In name of patriotism, the local leaders carry on their respective vested interest. The chairman of the municipal corporation of Malgudi Town feels excess pride and privilege for aiding

an auction fund to the national property. In this context Narayan says. "Statue for sale. Two and a half tons of excellent metal. I deal gift for patriotic friend offers above ten thousand will be considered (R.K. Narayan, *Malgudi Days*, Lawley Road, Page, 104)

The role of innocence, the child psychology is significant in the story world of Manoj Das. The softness of childmind, and the 'Milk of humankindness' of adults are also reflected in Manoj Das story. In the words of Harvey Jone, 'Manoj Das is a rare person in today's world he is story teller of the old kind. One can imagine a host of happy faced children sitting at his feet, enraptured by the story he tells and adults drawing ever nearer to also. (Harvey Jone, 1979)

Sun times. (Naïve, innocent and luminous pur).

We see a touch of childhood in the story 'Sweet for the Angel' of R.K. Narayan. Here angels stands symbolic as childhood simplicity and faith. It reminds Oscar Wilde's 'The Selfish Giant' where the giant could well realized the simplicity of children at the end of the story. Long before it is hinted in the previous chapter so far, The protagonist Kulu of the story distributed sweets to the children while they were getting back to their home at the cross road. The innocent children crowded him with (insatiable) desire from his hand. This shows that the children would not have any power of discrimination of evil and good also they did not have the idea of mischief of kidnapper. Ultimately the character Kulu suffers a lot, when the congregated adults biting to him feeling him to be a kidnapper. In the story 'A Hero' where the child protagonist 'Swami' does not have any sense of situation that would come thick and fast in the dark night. Because he faces the challenge of father to spend a dark night in a solitary room being away from the lap of Granny.

The story 'A letter from Last Spring', 'The Dusky Hour', and Lakshmi's Adventure are ever memorable once. In these stories the child protagonist like Lakshmi, Lily and Reena win the sympathy and admiration creating pity and fear in the mind of reader. They are the real tragic protagonist to create 'katharsis and hamartia' from the Aristotle point of view. Reena's simple faith to have a letter from her mother, Lily's lamentable death on the mountain passage and Lakshmi's tragic end create pity and fear, reminding Shakespearean and Hardy's tragic protagonist. "Hatu's accidental life long saint hood for the sake of Lily's tragic death haunt and hound a reader's heart. It enforces once again to go through the stories for one's own purgation. The pathos stamped in the heart of the readers remind R.K. Narayan's tragic story, 'The watchman'. A young girl comes to a tank to commit a suicide, because of her high ambition she apprehended her dream to be a doctor would not be translated into reality for

poverty. The watchman convinced her not to commit such heinous crime. He advises with the words "may God bless you with ten children" He adds.

Everyone has his own miseries. If people tried to kill themselves for each one them, I don't know how often they would have to drown.....you are young and you don't know what sorrow isI prayed to all the gods in the

world for a son. My wife bore me eight children. Only one daughter lives now and none of the others saw eleventh year..... (R.K. Narayan, '*Magudi Days*' 'The watchman'), p. 41. The story reminds the contrasting end that opposes to the tragic end of above cited stories of Manoj Das. It seems to be a tragic comedy. In Manoj Das's most of the stories like 'Farewell to Ghosts' and others reflect horror, and terrible uncanny atmosphere here which contrasts to the important stories of R.K. Narayan.

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